

Hope this can be  
of some use to you.

Tom

(two copies)

This set of informal notes discusses possible answers to three questions:

(1) what the objectives would be of a special program to recruit and assist students from culturally dissonant backgrounds, (2) in what ways these objectives can be promoted, and (3) by what criteria the success of such a program can be measured.

In answer to the first question, the objective should be:

- (a) To bring the proper students into the program -- that is, to locate identify, and provide for the admission of potential participants;
- (b) To get participants to accept and promote certain fundamental values of the academic community and society at large. These include values associated with the free expression of ideas, the free movement and access of all persons and viewpoints, awareness and responsiveness to social responsibilities and interdependencies, personal responsibility for individual activity, and other values basic to society but within which great diversity in personal philosophy and individual development can be encouraged;
- (c) To provide an academic and extracurricular environment within which the student can develop cultural and personal identity, self-respect, and confidence in his ability to cope with the university and society at large;
- (d) To motivate the student to try to succeed academically, either within the terms of the usual academic framework of regular students, or within the framework of some special family of custom-made programs of academic development.

(e) To maximize the number of students who persevere in their programs through receipt of a university degree, subject to maintenance of an appropriate rate of success in the attainment of the above objectives.

(The lowest possible failure rate in these other areas might not necessarily be the most desirable rate.)

The second question -- how to promote these objectives -- demands a detailed and comprehensive program, a program that evolves experimentally rather than proceeds from a prior blueprint. Efforts to identify and respond to the needs of the undergraduate equivalent of the hardcore unemployed must be coordinated into a plan with many aspects. These include financial assistance (scholarships, loans, part-time employment), tutorial assistance, special academic courses or experiences, and considerations related to living arrangements. The remarks of the next few paragraphs do not concentrate on these aspects; rather they briefly outline a proposal for personal counselling and assistance of each younger student by an older one with a similar background and a record of success (or at least survival) in the university environment.

This proposal amounts to a subprogram within the context of the overall efforts alluded to above. It would provide for each freshman and sophomore participant, an older (junior or senior) student in the program to act as an advisor. Each advisor should assume responsibility for one or two entering students, especially during the first year or two. He should take an interest in the younger



student's problems of all types: financial, academic, personal, legal, and the like. He should live nearby, preferably in the same living unit. His relationship with the advisee should begin as early in the college career of the latter as possible. Toward this end, the older advisor-to-be ideally should participate in the recruiting process by visiting in places where potential students are likely to be found, publicizing the program, forming friendships with candidates, and assisting them through the application process. (Of course, the establishment of this personal acquaintance with the advisee as early as the recruitment phase cannot be realized in a very high percentage of cases. But to the extent that it can, the advisor has gained a valuable measure of respect and indebtedness on the part of the newcomer that will greatly strengthen the advisor's position after the newcomer enters the university.) In any event it is essential that personal relations between the two be unusually compatible. For this reason, advisors and entering students should be paired through some process of mutual selection rather than through an assignment by the administration.

It should be clear that "advisor" and "counselor" are not very precise terms to describe the relationship being defined here, because they may connote in the eyes of the target group, an authority figure or representative of the establishment. If it were not for George Orwell's unfortunate preemption, "big brother" would be a more appropriate term.

More important than the terminology is the idea behind this relationship. Let us look at it first from the standpoint of the advisee. An entering student from a culturally disadvantaged background needs someone with whom he can identify, who appreciates the special variety of his problems, and who can be called on frequently for specific advice and, more importantly, for general moral support. Because of the frequently encountered view of the establishment as evil incarnate -- an outlook that is being peddled wholesale within the young black and brown communities from which the participants in the program are primarily to be drawn -- the effectiveness of the relationship will be greatly enhanced if the advisor does not seem too far removed from his charge. This is why it would appear beneficial to have no ethnic removal (both are Latins, blacks, or whatever) and little status removal (both are students, both are participants in the special program). Viewed by the younger student, the main perceived differences between himself and his advisor will be that the latter is two or three years older and has a record of successfully surviving two or three years in this unfamiliar university environment.

The counseling relationship being outlined here can be fully as valuable to the advisor as to the entering freshman. It promotes within the advisor the five objectives listed earlier. It is especially helpful in involving him directly in social responsibility and in developing for him a sense of identity and self-respect. It can be valuably a part of his intellectual experience.



Special academic credit could be given for the time-consuming and demanding work required of him. His practical experience in this area could, at his option, be combined with more theoretically oriented studies in sociology, behavioral sciences, and related fields, to constitute an excellent undergraduate background for a variety of professions. But this aspect of the nature of the advisor's experience should be low-keyed, since it is extremely important to avoid alienating the newcomers by giving them cause to feel exploited by their advisors. In designing the program, great care must be taken to avoid giving the participants the feeling that they are guinea pigs or pawns to be manipulated in yet another scheme of "the system."

Subject to this caveat, it would appear feasible and desirable to provide some form of unobtrusive incentives to those who successfully act as advisors. This might take the form of scholarship increases, cash payments, or course credit. These incentives to potential advisors (i.e., the more mature, senior members of the program) should remain secondary to that provided by the opportunity for a rich and interesting experience in helping someone of a like background.

In a program of this type, how does one insure quality relationships and prevent beating the system via mutual back-scratching? One response to this question is to point to the need for good administrative direction and monitoring of the program by people who can sense the subtle difference between helpful guidance and counterproductive administrative interference. This is not easy.

The administrators must recognize from the beginning that advisor-advisee relationships will be highly personal, and not all of them will contribute to the program's objectives. We can expect to produce a few fire-breathing anarchists who honed their hatred for society under the inspiration of their college advisors. But we should be prepared to accept a limited rate of counterproductive experiences for the sake of the overall program, and ask, "What can be done to improve the rate of success?" For one thing, good preselection and training of advisors would be helpful. A series of instructional sessions to explain the aims and techniques of advisorship would be helpful, perhaps including Synanon or sensitivity training methods for goal definition and team building. But the indoctrination aspect must be carefully conceived in order to avoid having the advisors come to think of themselves or project themselves as authority figures.

Several important questions remain unanswered in this brief exploration of a big brother (Soul Brother?) program. For example, for a particular incoming freshman participant, what would be the relationship of the advisor and the variety of traditional student tutors who would continue to be needed for assistance in the advisee's academic program? One possibility would be for advisors and academic tutors to operate in parallel: each would be independent of the other and would provide his advice and assistance to the advisee on request. An alternative arrangement would call for the advisor to discuss the need for tutorial assistance



with the recipient and arrange for the initial contact with the tutor in each academic area, using his judgment and personal knowledge of available tutors within a pool.

The issue of tutorial assistance is one of several facets of the overall proposal needing a great deal of additional thought and experimentation.

As indicated earlier, this proposal concentrates on but one aspect of a more comprehensive program. It is worth emphasizing that this aspect is not one wherein one class of people aids another, but a man-to-man program which provides that the encouragement and guidance of one student be the personal responsibility of another. Its appeal is based generally on the expectation that the advisor relationship would, more often than not, foster the five objectives listed above, and specifically on the self-evident proposition that a young person is more likely to adopt values and basic attitudes from someone whom he admires and can identify with, than from various representatives of subcultures other than his own.

The final issue, raised at the outset, concerns the difficult area of evaluation. An index of how well the overall program is meeting the last of the five objectives listed is the dropout rate for participants as compared with that for the university as a whole. Two difficulties limit the usefulness of this measure. First,



there is the question of what is the ideal dropout rate. But more fundamentally, if the dropout rate is not exorbitant, a much more important issue is how well the other objectives of the program are being met. Response to this must necessarily be subjective.

One possible device for appraising an ongoing program consists of requiring a periodic evaluation by the participants themselves. For example, at quarterly intervals each participant could be interviewed by a program administrator or an impartial outsider whose apparent attributes would enable him to elicit frank responses from the subject. The session might take place between an interviewer and program participants scheduled individually or in groups, depending on which format seems experimentally to produce more complete and unbiased response. The format for each interviewee should include an opportunity for free-form expression of opinion. In addition a common set of evaluative questions should be administered to each student individually, either by private interview or written questionnaire. By mutual agreement, interviews might be taped (unobtrusively) for subsequent transcription.

An interaction of this sort serves a dual purpose. It allows the student an opportunity to evaluate the mechanics of the program and his relationship to it. (What has my experience at the university been, in comparison with what I currently believe it ought to be? What improvements can be realized by changes

in my behavior and/or the structure of the program?") It simultaneously allows the program administrators an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and possible changes in its operation.

In addition to student evaluations of self and program through interviews and questionnaires, the progress of individual participants might be recorded by persons who work with or observe them. For the younger participant the observer could be his student advisor. (This might be counterproductive to a close working relationship, however.) Alternatively, the observer might be a faculty member, tutor, or program administrator.

Without experimentation it is not possible to determine the best combination of evaluative procedures. A reasonable speculation is that the most desirable plan would call for a mixture of self-appraisal by individuals, and general, subjective evaluation of the program by administrators, with more elaborate third-person evaluation of individuals confined to special cases.

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